

Village input needed

By Sarah Wolfe

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Machine Shop Village is one step closer to reviving its historical character. But residents and North Andover Historical Commission members are concerned that redesign efforts could be for nothing if the neighborhood isn't given a proper historic designation.

"Right now it's recognized as a historic district at the national and state level," said resident Liz Fennessy. "Locally, however, there are no protections against demolition. The Historic Commission is interested in making it a protected district."

Last week renovation designs for Elm Street were revealed to residents and the Historical Commission. They included replacing sidewalks and curbs with cement and granite and planting three elm trees to replace just a few of the many trees killed off by Dutch elm disease in the 1900s.

The designs mark the first phase of an improvement effort to recreate the Machine Shop Village streetscape around the old Davis & Furber mill buildings to better reflect its industrial-era beginnings. The \$250,000 for the first phase of the project was voted at the May Town Meeting to come from the Community Preservation Fund. Designs for Water and Main streets, the other two streets in Phase 1, will be unveiled at a public meeting in January. Design of Main, Water and Elm, and construction of Elm street, is expected to be completed by the end of 2006.

Fennessy has been leading the neighborhood effort with the Machine Shop Village Improvement Committee since the beginning of the project and said resident input is important right now.

"We sent out close to 300 postage-paid postcard surveys to residents asking what they thought of the project," she said.

One of the questions asked whether residents would support a bylaw that protected Machine Shop Village from developers.

Fennessy said the response rate has been low so far, with only 10 percent of the postcards coming back. Out of that 10 percent, she said a little more than two-thirds favored the historic designation.

"The purpose of the survey is to see if it's all worth it to go forward," Fennessy said. "At this point it seems to be favorable."

She strongly encourages neighbors and others interested in the Machine Shop Village project and historic designation to visit the town's Web site — www.townofnorthandover.com — and to look for the link under the Community Development Office. The site also has online versions of the survey.

She said there's no fixed consensus of residents needed to

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Putting a neighborhood on the map

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bring the issue to Town Meeting, that it would be something to discuss with the Historical Commission.

North Andover Historical Commission member Kathy Szyska said if neighbors are in favor of a historic designation, they'll need to decide between being a Local Historic District or a Neighborhood Conservation District. The former is more restrictive and requires permission from a designated commission to make certain changes to the exterior of homes, such as adding vinyl siding or vinyl replacement windows. The latter is less restrictive and works more with growth of a neighborhood, she explained.

"It has to come from the neighbors," Szyska said. "They have to meet a consensus before going to Town Meeting."

Water Street resident George Peters said that over the years many Machine Shop Village residents have turned their duplexes into single homes.

"My concern is we'd like to keep it as residential as we can. Number 6 on Water Street, which I own, is the only place that can be zoned as commercial property," he said. "Someone could easily come in and purchase the whole street where it's residential and commercial districting, but not when it's just residential."

Peters said he would be in favor of either designation, just as long as the sense of community in the neighborhood was preserved.

"I think most of my neighbors have been here for a long time," Peters said.

Elm Street resident Chris Allen believes it's important to retain the neighborhood's historical character.

"For those homes that have preserved their historic integrity, it's important to protect them," Allen said. "Lord knows this town has more developers than it needs. We need to slow it down."

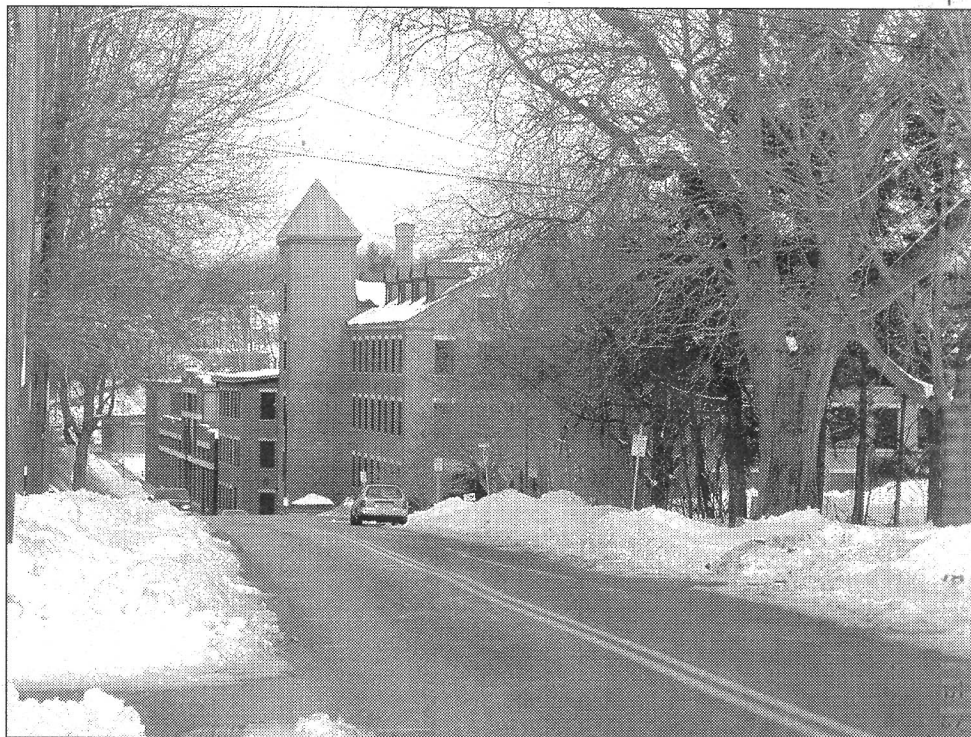


PHOTO BY SARAH WOLFE

Pictured is Elm Street stretching off toward the old Davis & Furber mill buildings. The street's sidewalks and curbs are expected to be reconstructed with cement and granite, and three elm trees will be planted in an effort to reflect Machine Shop Village's industrial-era beginnings.

The expectation is that property values will rise.

"One great thing about this is that it's a lot of residences in town, but they're adjacent to businesses," said Fennessy, "so it benefits the overall town."

She said that between 35 and 40 residents are communicating by e-mail right now to keep abreast of the latest developments in the Machine Shop Village project.

"Anyone that wants to add their name to the list can contact me," Fennessy said.

Fennessy's e-mail address is lizettafennessy@yahoo.com.

Fill out postage-paid postcard surveys and send back to Liz Fennessy of the Machine Shop Village Improvement Committee.

Surveys and information on the project can also be found on the town's Web site at www.townof-northandover.com. If interested in being included on an e-mail list for the latest developments, e-mail lizettafennessy@yahoo.com.